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Moderator: Julie Marcy
Large Group Virtual Meeting Facilitation – Silver Jackets Case Study
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Julie Marcy: Hello everyone. I'm (Julie Marcy) and I work at the ERDC Environmental Lab in Vicksburg, Mississippi. Welcome to our Joint Facilitators Exchange and Collaboration and Public Participation Community of Practice Webinar on Facilitating Large Virtual Conferences. From viewing the participant list, it appears that we have attendees from across the Corps as well as some partners and associates from other organizations so welcome to all of you.

This series of web meetings is intended to share facilitation and collaboration topics of interest and also to provide an informal venue for exchanging best practices. The web meetings are recorded and archived. Files are posted on the facilitator's exchange webpage that you see on the address showing on the facilitators exchange intro slide. It's the third bullet.

Just a few more notes before we start our session. As we begin, I'm going to mute all attendees to eliminate background noise. Later, if you wish to speak after I unmute everyone you'll just need to hit your mute button again if you had used that or use the star six. 'm going to go ahead and mute at this time.

Operator: All participants are now in listen-only mode.

(Julie Marcy): Okay. We will go through the presentation, afterwards we'll have about a 10 to 15 minute session for questions and answers for (Hunter) and (Maria). You can ask questions either verbally or using the little chat box on your screen in

front of you. But if there's a term that's unfamiliar to you during the presentation, you're welcome to ask a question to help your comprehension then. So don't hesitate to use chat or ask us if you have a question where you need some clarification.

Normally, we have about half the session for a presentation and half to share best practices. This time though, since the topic is of such high interest we're going to devote most of our time to the actual presentation and its Q&A. And then following the session we'll have a short open dialogue forum where you can share some best practices or ask general facilitation or collaboration questions.

Lastly in order to have a more comprehensive list of attendees, if it's not apparent from your sign-in name that's showing on the participant list, would you please take a moment to use chat to show your name and organization. That might be, Joe Smith, Fort Worth District or Fort Worth District - four attendees. That just gives us a better listing of who's participating in the sessions.

And with that I'll tell you a little bit about today's speakers on large group virtual meeting facilitation - lessons learned from flood risk management silver jackets webinar week. Your speakers are (Hunter Merritt) with the Sacramento District and (Maria Placht) with the Institute of Water Resources.

(Hunter) is a study manager with the Sacramento District Planning Division Water Resources Branch. He has 25 years of facilitation experience and has conducted several planning sessions and charettes recently. He's also an adventure guide, an outdoor educator and a corporate facilitator for leadership development programs.

(Maria Placht) is a collaboration specialist in the Conflict Resolution and Public Participation Center at IWR. She's been involved with charrettes and she currently serves as a mediator on the Department of Defense roster of neutrals and on the leadership committee for the association for conflict resolution environment and public policy section.

More information about (Hunter) and (Maria)'s backgrounds may be found on their bios posted on the facilitator pages, along with a copy of the PowerPoint that they're sharing today. And if some of you are outside the Corps and don't have access to that page, I posted my email address for (Julie Marcy) in the chat feature. Just let me know if you want to receive a PDF copy of the PowerPoint or additional information.

(Hunter) and (Maria) we're very happy to have you with us today and to share your experiences with us and with that I'm going to give (Hunter) presenter rights and (Hunter) you can take it away.

(Hunter Merritt): Okay, that's great. Thank you so much (Julie). I hope everyone can hear me. (Julie) can you hear me okay?

(Julie Marcy): We can hear you fine.

(Hunter Merritt): Super. Well thank you very much for the introduction and I'm really excited to be able to share a bit of lessons learned. And like (Julie) said, you know, have a lot of this be a dialogue and questions and answers that we might be able to collaboratively focus on where we can be better. I think this is a very new medium and I think it's exciting to be part of the learning curve on it.

I - with the next slide I kind of, you know, (Maria) and I and (Julie) have talked about what we want to focus on but we also want to make sure that we

have - we're focused on an area that's going to be productive for everybody that's on the line. As you see in the slide we're going to try to go through a few of these questions of when and why should we use a virtual meeting format, what different technologies there are available? We'll focus on two of them but there are some other technologies out there.

When you're in a position as a facilitator to put this together identifying who might be the participants in an event like this and who might be the presenters and what you can do to be successful trying to facilitate that. Then we'll also kind of share a little bit of lessons learned and how did we manage to facilitate a large group event like this. We would welcome any constructive criticism on how it can be done better.

So with that I do actually want to acknowledge that a lot of the folks on the line are facilitators and you may very well be a person who has some expertise of your own. So with that I want to use this time to put up a poll. If you haven't participated in one this is what it should look like. One second and I'll post it right now.

Your experience with facilitating virtual conferences. If you read through this question and then take a moment to answer the question and put yourself in one of these categories - A, B, C or D. I'll just give it, you know, we'll say about a minute. I have a time limit of two minutes. With that this might be able to focus our energy on a dialogue. So give it about ten more seconds here.

Okay, we close this and you've got 15 seconds here. It'll close and I'll post the results for you. It's an interesting - like I said - a collaborative learning process that we go through in terms of using the tools and technologies that we have. Here are the results that I have for that and it looks like many folks

said they have no experience at all. So what that tells me and tells us hopefully is that when we get to the point of introducing the technologies we can maybe get a question and answer going or you can write your questions down or send a chat question.

So with that thank you very much for participating in the poll. I want to hand it over to (Maria) and (Maria) if I were to make you the presenter is that how we can have our view as well?

(Maria Placht): (Hunter) can you hear me?

(Hunter Merritt): I can hear you.

(Maria Placht): Okay. Can you see me?

(Hunter Merritt): Just a moment I believe.

(Maria Placht): Alright well I'll go ahead and get started as the video pops up. (Julie) thanks very much for the introduction and thanks everyone for allowing us to really share our experiences with you and have a conversation I think about a really interesting topic.

So our case study really for today in terms of talking about virtual facilitation is the projects management silver jackets webinar week. So can I just get a show of hands from everybody on the line - how many of you are familiar with Silver Jacket Program so I know how much background to give? You just click the raise hand box at the bottom of your participant list. I can see how many of you raise your hands.

So okay we definitely have some people who aren't familiar with it so just some quick background on the program. It's really created or based on the concept that flood risk management is a shared responsibility and the intent of the Silver Jacket Program is to create forums in each state. We are state based teams that really pull together the federal agencies, the state agencies and sometimes local entities into really looking at how to jointly manage the flood risk for that state and really create a common forum to talk about that state's priorities.

So this - I'm not sure how long the program has been going on for but I know that there are about 40 state teams. And each year they have a conference to bring together the teams to talk about lessons learned and some of the goals for each year's conference are listed here on your side. Really an opportunity to share what your team is working on, a way to try and unify and improve approaches across the state based teams with respect to communicating flood risk. And the overall goal really is to affect change and affect behavior change at all levels. And then also talk amongst the federal community about how to provide services in a more coordinated effective manner.

So this is the goal of each of these conferences every year and I just wanted to give you some quick background about what it looks like as we move on. So for this year's conference we have 430 registered participants. And just give you a quick snapshot of what the agenda looked like just so you have a picture in your mind. It was four days. I know this font is a bit small but it's just really to give you a sense of how it unfolded.

The webinar week started on Tuesday. It was held four hours a day - 1:00 to 5:00 PM each day. The main webinar week conference occurred Tuesday through Thursday and that was a combination of planning sessions and then concurrent sessions. So you'll see a lot of concurrent sessions that people

could register just like a regular in-person conference. It looks like a regular in-person conference agenda. And then on Friday was really a day for training and some discussions.

And so I would - this effort was pulled together really by a team of planners from the Silver Jackets and Projects Management programs on the floor. There were really four critical planners that pulled this together. And then we had facilitators for this effort as well and that's why you're hearing from (Hunter) and I. I was sort of the lead facilitator or facilitator and manager for the effort. (Hunter) was one of the facilitators - one of three who - and I think a couple of them are on the line - both the planners and the facilitators - to provide their input as we move forward today.

So (Hunter) let me turn it back over to you.

(Julie Marcy):   Okay. And (Hunter) you may need to unmute. You're not...

(Hunter Merritt): Thank you very much.

(Julie Marcy):   There you go.

(Hunter Merritt): I forgot there. That's why we have a facilitator. Thank you (Julie).

As (Maria) said I was one of a team of facilitators and I really want to emphasize throughout this that it's critical that you have a team and a team that can communicate with one another. So I'll say more than once in this presentation kudos to that team and those of you that are on the call that participated on the Silver Jackets webinar. If you didn't really recognize that there was a facilitation going on then we must have done a good job because

generally you don't know until something is absent or falling apart so really big kudos to the team.

The next slide you see here, you know, why do you have a virtual meeting format at all? Why don't we just get together in, you know, the convention center like we do every year? And so I just wanted to put up a couple of bullets to really focus on why you might consider embracing this and for those of us who have embraced it, how you might be able to really push for this as a medium.

Real simple basic math - like (Maria) said - there were 430 participants this year. How much would it cost - TDY and all of the other costs that are associated with a conference? And it's pretty easy to say that there's a big cost savings there. You might be losing a few things. We can acknowledge that there's some - perhaps some fidelity loss or some opportunity loss that you don't have a chance to actually physically go get a cup of coffee with somebody and have some of those offline conversations that you do at a conference however there is some benefits gained too.

The ability to log in and log out was something that the feedback came back that people would, you know, really appreciated to be able to log in for their lunch hour or log in for one session only. So there's a lot of accessibility there.

The archiving ability - I think (Julie) could speak to this, you know, more specifically if we get into a question and answer about it but just as an example on the environment gateway, there are 139,000 hits in the last year and a half on materials that were made available. So every one of these sessions were recorded and people can go back or they can share with other folks. I think that's a big plus.

And we're going to acknowledge that there are some - there are some comfort levels that are different for different folks but I know that I teach part time at a university here and it's embraced very well in the generation that I'm working with to have their iPhones ready to engage. So a different type of engagement. It's a different level of engagement. There might be some loss but there is a lot gained there in terms of engaging folks different ways as long as we're creative.

So with that we saved a fair bit in terms of the webinar week cost savings. As you can see in this slide here, you know, the webinar week almost doubled your participation for only a percentage of the cost. That level of engagement is, you know, is something that we want to continue to monitor and see if people feel as though there's something that's critical that is lost that we can be creative about trying to engage folks. So with that feedback that we got from the webinar week we're going to try to make this a, you know, even more of an engaging experience.

The archive recordings - we'll tell you where that is at the end of this presentation. You can access those and see any one of those topics and I think that that was a big plus. So for you as facilitators what should you use or what should we use? And based on that first poll with a lot of folks not having any experience at all, I'll let you know that you're participating right now in AT&T Web Meeting. So that might be the only medium that you've seen. However I'd like to use one of the tools that we have here to see what tools you prefer.

And that is to say in your upper left hand corner is a little arrow. If you click that arrow and then specifically pick the bubble that you feel like you use most or you are only - the only one you're familiar with. So go ahead and do

that. I'll give you about ten more seconds. You'll see that your names are popping up covering up this AT&T web meeting. Obviously a lot of folks are participating in that.

And some folks are familiar with Defense Connect Online. I'm surprised actually to see that there are folks that are using Go To Meeting. Not that it's a surprise to me but that the - that there's some familiarity with it. I'm going to - maybe in the question and answer I'll ask those folks who have used Go To what your responses are to that.

(Julie Marcy):   (Hunter) this is (Julie). Remember we have some folks attending from outside the Corps as well so they may have access to additional programs.

(Hunter Merritt): Excellent point. That fourth bubble is the others. I only see that (Laura) responded to that and (Laura) you can either star six and tell us what you use or you can send it into chat and chat to everyone what other tools you have. I'm seeing a lot of AT&T Web Meeting. I'm seeing maybe a little bit less Defense Connect Online.

Those are the two media that we're going to be focused on today. So I'm going to erase these pointers and move onto the next slide and tell you a little bit about the differences between Defense Connect Online and AT&T Web Meeting because those are the two we focused on for this silver jacket.

We started with Defense Connect Online because and (Maria) you know, feel free to jump in here and say differently but I, you know, I'm a big advocate of Defense Connect Online. We've paid for it. It's the army's version of Adobe Connect or is using the Adobe Connect platform. And it's pretty - it gives you a lot of autonomy. You don't need ASIT for a call, you know, you don't have to call in for ASIT to use it however when you do use it you may choose to

use an AT&T conference call - telephone call line in addition. But there's audio available and you can test that system out.

You just login and register. Use your CAC card and register. And then once you've done it I think the greatest benefit of Defense Connect Online is that if you know that you're going to - say you're at a feasibility study and you're going to be working with this PDT or this group several times, you can go in and create a URL and then dedicate it to that one topic. You leave the persistent files - you can leave it as a persistent meeting and then return to that same URL and everything that you put in there stays in there.

So we use the - I use the analogy of saying it's like having your own car. I own a car. I parked it this morning. Everything that's in the trunk hopefully - knock on wood - will be in it at the end of the day when I get done with work. I go and open up the car and there's everything just as I left it. So and I'll note one more bullet here. There is access beyond the firewall but it can be challenging as far as the Defense Connect Online specifically as a platform.

So the other platform - the other form of virtual media is AT&T. And so if we're using the analogy of a car owner, AT&T is more like a car rental. You go to the airport. You get off the plane and you go and rent a car. It's going to be the same kind of car you had before but it's empty. It's clean. And so it's nice in the sense that you know what it's going to look like every time you open it. It isn't persistent meeting but you can save the files like these files that are up here today. When the meeting's closed you can save these files but they aren't going to stay in the meeting room.

So it's a very familiar platform within and outside of the Department of Defense and it's good for presentations webinars like this because you have a small number of presenters and other folks can engage with one another on

the chat and use the other tools. Some things to acknowledge that it does cost each time you use it so there's a little bit of a drawback as opposed to the already paid for defense connect online.

Unless you already have a Reservationless number you would have to reserve a telephone line for the webinar or the presentation. Those of you facilitators that are going to be using a medium over and over again I would urge you to consider getting a Reservationless. It's very helpful but you do need to get some district and division approval to do that.

So those are the two types. What did we use and why? We started with DCO but running a few trial runs we found that there was - there were some technical, you know, technological challenges with that. So we went ahead and moved to AT&T knowing that there would be many people participating that were beyond the USACE network firewall issues that I think they're not insurmountable but I think they were enough of a challenge that we wanted to make sure that engagement was easy.

And so we went with AT&T. It's served us very well and (Maria)'s going to speak to a little bit of the feedback we got from that. But some real quick bullets is that you need to know that when you have more than 125 folks that Reservationless call line may be exceeded so you have to know a little bit about who your audience is. And so these are some of the features that AT&T had that we used for the webinar week.

So when you're facilitating or you get asked to facilitate - two questions - who's going to participate in this and who's going to be presenting. First who you're going to have as a participation group - that'll drive a lot about which technology you use. And when you get that word out, you know, make sure that you get out a backup and share the information of the person who might

be able to answer questions because when you get in there the day of the event you can anticipate that there will be a challenge and you'll be - as a facilitator - focused on that one webinar or that one presentation of a large group - maybe multiple going on at once.

You definitely want a (Maria Placht) expediting the floor. So that was the role that (Maria) had for all of us as a team. One of the I think great things to note is that you have an opportunity when you have people participating in the virtual environment. You have an opportunity to get a list pretty easily of who is there and if you can plan for the end at the beginning by strategically placing maybe a week later some form of follow-on call to get feedback from the group and to have an opportunity to share what information you have uploaded.

I think that planning for that engagement is a critical piece so that the folks remember that they took their lunch break last Wednesday and did this and now oh, here are the tools that I got from that. So that's something - those are some things to consider.

Then you want to focus on who your presenters on because as facilitator, you know, I think my role in this - in Silver Jackets - was certainly to introduce myself to the team of presenters and to let them know that I'm there to help them make this presentation shine. So again like we said before, there are a lot of generations in the workforce. Some are comfortable. Some are not with virtual technology. So you want to set yourself up for success by saying hey, let's get together this Friday and we'll mess around with the tools and let them play with those tools.

We often have again another analogy, you know. I have a microwave at home and it has lots and lots of buttons for lots and lots of different things. I've

never used any of them. I generally press one, zero, zero, start and let it heat up and if it's not warm enough, I stick it back in and put one, zero, zero again. So a lot of times we have these web tools that we don't use that the only thing that's keeping us from using them is I don't want to be pressing that button while we're trying to present.

So with that said I would like to open another poll. What is your experience with webcams? I'm on a webcam right now. So one of these answers would probably capture your experience or your feeling about webcams.

(Maria Placht):   (Hunter) you don't have one that says I'm scared of webcams. Sorry. Just had to add that.

(Hunter Merritt):   That's true. That's true. I'm making assumptions that folks are willing maybe to go beyond I'll never use one. But maybe I have one and have never used it or I have one and I won't ever use it might be your answer. It's interesting. So a lot of folks who know that they have a webcam never used it. That C category - I tried it but it wasn't a good experience. Maybe I tried it or maybe in the D category - I have one and I'll use it if I'm asked to but I'm not so hot on it.

I know that using it any time you can - we're all a little bit nervous about being shown on TV or on screen. It would be great to know what happens when we get Google glasses. So nobody here is jumping on the opportunity yet. I'll close this poll and in about 20 seconds once it closes I'll share the results with you.

There are lots of little tools. If you do use the webcam or if you ask presenters to use the webcam you'll notice behind me that there's just a little bit of signage behind me - a little bit of color. You can use some or none. Just check

for, you know, operational security. You don't want anything that's private to be shown. You also want to make sure that your lighting is good because just a big shadow doesn't really help. Here's your results for those folks that - it's split easily 50/50 split here. It looks like that some have one and never used it and some are willing and comfortable with using it and that's great.

The handouts that you have available you want to get from those presenters and then you can go through them as a facilitator and see if you can find ways that you can be engaging so that - and I apologize. I have a ringer in the back that I can't turn off. So you want to try to figure out a way that you as a facilitator can engage the audience. I mean I went ahead and did the poll myself because I like doing this kind of thing but this is something that (Julie) and I would have a conversation with each other about how she would, you know, facilitate that and make that an engaging experience.

What else do we have? Oh, if you do find that the presentation is going to be shared - a shared screen - I think that one of the pieces that I recommend is that you ask your presenters to close Outlook and any other things that might popup. So just like your room in the background you want to also check the background of your presenter's computer. And if you can post any PDF's in advance then everybody knows what they're going to be seeing so telling them what you're going to tell them.

Our participants and our presenters for webinar week - we had a great diversity of presenters and a great diversity of participants. Several agencies participate in the conversation and we had a lot of presenters - many of them in a panel format where kind of like (Maria) and I are trading back and forth. We had 15 minutes for one person and then we would switch to the next and the third.

We had one call and discovered very quickly that we need to have another call and maybe a third call with each group. And so what we did was to set up a technology test day and let those folks participate and play around with the tools again. The participant list was provided to all the presenters so that they knew who they were presenting to and I thought that that was a very helpful tool. (Maria) I'm going to kind of ask if you have, you know, what you have in terms of feedback on that for this slide.

(Maria Placht): I'm sorry. Yes, I'll just add that, as (Hunter)'s previous slide mentioned, you really need to plan for residence or discomfort with the technology. So in the case of webinar week, we had the pre-technology test phase and we had several dry runs with the presenters.

And in both of those cases with the participants and then with the presenters it was all about familiarizing them with the technology, trying to encourage them to use it. And that's why last when he said I didn't have a - I'm scared of webinar - I'm scared of the webcam up there because so many of the presenters - even though they might have had a webcam they were not so excited about using it. So a lot of our facilitation role was really easing people into the technology and trying to really push them to use it. And I think that's all I wanted to add (Hunter).

(Hunter Merritt): Okay. I'll move onto the next slide and just say that, you know, once again (Maria) and I communicated a lot ahead of time just one on one because both of us are big fans of this technology as a medium and even with all of the advocacy that we provide, you know, we would run into some challenges I think and it was really about communicating and trusting one another.

So, you know, I mentioned at the beginning and I'm saying it now and I'll say it one more time before the end is that just really a huge kudos to the team for

that. Knowing that that person is in the middle that can share information back and forth was a big plus. So the plan that we had - who's facilitating and which session - we split it up. If you recall that image early on in the presentation we had basically three columns and we had one facilitator on each column dedicated all week. So my column was I think column one and so anything that was A, B, C, D, E throughout the week - I was more or less the facilitator on every one of those presentations.

(Julie Marcy): (Hunter) this is (Julie) if I can interrupt just a minute. We've had one question come in. How did the participants receive the materials for the Silver Jackets? Did you send it to them ahead of time or did you send by email or SharePoint? How did you go about distributing materials?

(Hunter Merritt): It's a great question. We did not. We actually and correct me if I'm wrong on this (Maria) but we received all the presentation materials from the presenters. We did not share it with the participants until after the presentations. Is that - (Maria) is that correct?

(Maria Placht): Yes and we have the website link at the end of the presentation for you guys to visit. So (Hunter) can I add a few things about this slide?

(Hunter Merritt): Absolutely, please.

(Maria Placht): Just another show of hands in terms of, we use these words facilitation plan and facilitation guide. How many of you on the phone would consider yourselves facilitators - not virtual facilitators just facilitators in general? Can I get a show of hands from those on the phone if you consider yourself a facilitator? I see some people who I know consider themselves facilitators but I'm not seeing their hands go up.

(Hunter Merritt): I'm seeing the same thing. I'm not going to call anybody out.

(Maria Placht): Okay well I'm not going to ask you any secret questions. I just wanted to clarify these terms. You know, often facilitators will come up with plans and guides and it's really designed to help them think through their step by step process for how they're approaching the workshop or the meeting. And so we did the same thing here even though of course it was a virtual meeting.

We did the exact same thing and as (Hunter) was saying, the facilitation plan was that we all contributed to it. All of the facilitators entered in what they were planning to do - their call in numbers, their codes, their agenda for their specific one hour webinar and it was all in the SharePoint. So if something happened or just for them to follow but then if anybody else needed to jump in as a backup that whole plan would be on a SharePoint for every of the 25 sessions and it was good to go with what was supposed to happen.

And then the facilitation guide was what the tool that the facilitators used themselves to make sure all the facilitators were really presenting a similar approach to their specific webinar. It literally had step by step and, you know, processes for what you do before the webinar, what to do when you log in like before we actually start - what (Julie Marcy) was doing 15 minutes before the call started.

It talks a lot about phone etiquette which is important when we are conducting these things online making sure people are being respectful and muting themselves, etcetera. And then, what facilitators needed to do after the webinar was over. There were various steps.

So it was sort of the one stop shop facilitation step by step guide that we followed.

(Julie Marcy):   (Maria) and (Hunter) one other question and it may be more appropriate to
                    address it a little bit later. We had one question about whether any of your
                    presentations included showing videos over WebEx and if so how that went
                    for you.

(Maria Placht):   They did though should we - yes that was the quick answer - yes.

(Hunter Merritt):   I know I have one piece to offer on that and that is one of the challenges you
                    have is audio versus video in the webinar. And when you play a video to
                    consider that most folks - everybody's on the telephone right now. so when
                    you play a video you need to let everybody know that the video isn't - the
                    audio of that film is not going to be broadcast over the telephone unless you
                    set it up - as a facilitator set it up with a speaker next to a speaker - that kind
                    of thing.

                    Again just what I would recommend - urge always - is to find out whatever
                    materials any presenter wants to give - get them in your hands and play
                    around with them and mess up offline so that you can feel like everybody
                    knows where the pitfalls might be.

                    I know that there was only - I think (Ilene) had one person who wanted to play
                    a video and I don't remember what the feedback was whether that turned out
                    successfully or not but I know that that became a topic of one of our...

(Maria Placht):   It was a challenge. It was absolutely a challenge for her and she figured it out.
                    (Eileen Takata) was one of the other facilitators and I think what they ended
                    up doing was just sharing the link and people played it themselves because
                    AT&T webinar is not - this version of it - this Reservationless line version of

it is not sufficiently capable of showing a video. So if you can just click on the video and went and watched it and then came back together.

(Julie Marcy):   Yes and (Maria) and (Hunter) this is (Julie). I'll share just one thing. I have done some other videos, but normally we do that using the shared desktop feature and the videos will run better that way but you're still going to see a little bit of, pixilation in it. So as (Maria) said, it's not 100%.

(Hunter Merritt):   So, you know, as a sort of a lessons learned there we're going to go to another slide with lessons learned from the webinar week. But just in terms of knowing some of the things you need to know is insuring that you have a high quality audio especially if you're going to have a mix of virtual participants and physical real participants in a room. You want to make sure that you have enough audio that everyone can hear it so that you're set up for success there.

And engaging the virtual - engaging those participants is a big, you know, is part of our jobs as facilitators and counting on every 10 to 15 minutes we would try to have - I'd like to see if we can have some sort of question of the participants to make sure that they were still participating and if they can raise their hand like (Maria)'s been doing and so forth.

(Hunter Merritt):   And then the last thing just sort of speaking to the video question and that is just to have backups for your backups. Just always consider that oh well we're going to try to do it this way but then we'll have a backup.

The last thing that I want to just focus on and I have my laser pointer pointed at is the pre-webinar steps. I'm in a room right now that's behind a cypher lock. Nobody's here. I can speak on a speakerphone. This is the room that I was in when we did our webinar week and I would urge that you as a facilitator try to find a quiet room that's not going to disturb your other folks

and that you won't get distracted yourself. And that's sort of one of the big takeaways for me.

I'm going to move to the sort of - this is our last slide in terms of lessons learned. And (Maria) you know, I would like to - I guess my portion of this in terms of lessons learned is this as a facilitator. I'm a people person. I love to facilitate because I really like to engage with people. And I know that I had quite an experience with this for the whole week. I think all of us would agree that at the end of the week we were wiped out because you're really interacting with a computer screen not getting as much off the warm feedback that you would in a real sense.

So I'm not saying that you shouldn't do it. I just want you to make sure that you know that you're cognizant of your own energy level because it was a big week to facilitate that much. It could not have happened without the team that we have and so I want to just - this'll be the last one that I say - really, really kudos to the whole Silver Jackets Team that was involved in this, to IWR, to (Maria).

As (Julie) mentioned in my introduction, I'm an adventure guide and I've taught a lot of raft guides. And I'll tell you one of the hardest things in the world is to try to get a raft down a river with a bunch of raft guys in it. So it takes a lot and it takes a lot of communication and a lot of trust so really big kudos for that.

(Maria) do you want me to go through these bullets and talk about some of the lessons learned from your perspective?

(Maria Placht): (Hunter) I would be happy to be on a raft with you any time. You will be dragged into any future virtual conferences that we do. Sure so let me just sum up.

Some of our lessons learned, you know, I am not sure but I think that this was the first virtual conference that we have had in the Corps of Engineers. Somebody please correct me - type in if I'm wrong. But it was a pretty unique experience. I think pretty innovative. Some people say cutting edge. Other people say bleeding edge. So I'm not quite sure which one applies here but we definitely got very good feedback and I think it was a success but that success as (Hunter) has said a million times was because of a team and because of all of the work that we did to make it so.

So I actually have about three pages of lessons learned - both the planning and the planners and the facilitators put together a pretty big long list of lessons learned as well as the feedback we heard from participants as well as that from the advisory committee that oversaw the whole effort. So I'm just going to flag a few here for you all to share kind of. These are the perspective of the team collectively. These aren't just mine.

So the first - I think an overwhelming most positive benefit of webinar week was the ability to reach a broader audience. You've heard that already. We did have 430 people register but we now have all of the recordings on the website and unlimited number of people can access that. So that's pretty impressive.

One of the downsides that we've found is people have a really hard time devoting their attention to webinars when they're in the office. We had a comment from a participant who said he felt like he needed to put caution tape across his office door because people think you're on the phone and I didn't put caution tape across my door but I put a big note out there that said don't

come in. People feel like they can walk in and interrupt you. They don't feel like you're actually doing work.

And they - a lot of people when you're listening to webinars people will come in when you're on the phone and just start talking to you. So we really need a bit of a culture change with that because people are really distracted and when other things come up it's easy to go and do those things and not attend the webinar.

And so what we found is we would have - we had people RSVP for each session and we consistently found about half of people who registered actually joined the session which was a very interesting discovery and a bit unfortunate because sometimes we paid for some lines that we really didn't need because some of those lines on the earlier slide that (Hunter) was talking about - those AT&T lines do cost money for over 250 people. So that's just a lesson learned.

So practicing technology - we've already been over this. I mean I frankly think that we are in the dark ages of virtual collaboration technology. I think it's pretty awful. I can't tell you how many backups for backups for backups that we put in place because something always goes wrong without a doubt.

And, you know, we look back on earlier technology ages of the typewriter and everyone laughs and said oh ha, ha that was so annoying, you know. We had to use White Out to correct mistakes or we had floppy disks that we had to use and it was, you know, so difficult and cumbersome.

Five or ten years from now we're going to be like remember those days of AT&T Webinar when everything always went wrong and you had to have backups for your backups. I really feel like we'll be joking about it at that

point because it - this stuff does not work very consistently. So just remember that when you are doing this is that if nothing goes wrong, you are very lucky.

Okay so another thing we learned is that webinars really should be spread out both for the facilitators as (Hunter) mentioned. It's really tough - it was really grueling actually to do four hours a day for four days in a row. You know, working in these webinar settings was tough and not only for the facilitators but for the participants as well and you guys can all attest to that. Even just sitting through a webinar like this you get antsy. Imagine doing this for four hours in a row.

That was a big lesson learned is that don't equate the in-person four day to a virtual four day. Spread out the same number of presentations over two weeks or even a month and if we do it again we would absolutely do it that way.

The next point here - getting full engagement interaction from the presenters and the participants is a challenge. The facilitators tried hard to help the presenters use the technology to its greater degree like (Hunter) messing with the microwave. We tried hard to help the presenters use all of the different buttons of the microwave but people aren't in that mindset yet, you know. We've tried to make this presentation engaging today as how we would like to see it with polling and hand raising and we would even include some question and answer I think if it were another type of webinar.

And people are resident and we have more work to do to get presenters to move in that direction and I think it's necessary because it requires a little more effort when you're presenting in a virtual setting than it does in an in-person setting. You really have to go the extra mile to insure that your audience is actually focusing on you and listening to you because you can't see them and they're probably checking their email. So you need to really

make an effort and as a facilitator you need to help your presenters make that effort and as a participant I would say it's the same challenge, there's lots of distractions.

So another point - people think that planning a webinar is less effort than in-person conferences - at least people that I've spoken with - and I would say that it's not true. The whole team - both the planners and the facilitators - found that they and especially it was easy to tell because the planners who planned the conference this year were the same as those that planned last year and they said they put in no less effort this year than they did last year with pulling together webinar week when compared to last year's in person conference. So don't think it's easier. It might even be harder because of the compensation you really have to do for having people in a virtual setting.

And then finally this last point was a really big question for us and we're not - we don't have the answer to this. You know, one of - everybody's favorite reason for going to a conference is networking and meeting new people and really being inspired by their conversations on the side. And in a webinar context it is difficult. So the one thing we came up with to do was leave the webinar and the phone lines open after the end of - after the conclusion of the webinar so that people could look up friends on the participant list, you know.

If you scroll down the participant list here you might find a friend and you can chat with them privately and we definitely had people take advantage of that. There was chatting going on, on the side, you know, as you might imagine after a main conference presentation but you're not really meeting anyone new that way. So what is telling that I think that the Corps needs some different virtual collaboration technology.

I think we need other options where we actually have a virtual space that people can go into and create a profile and express their interests and mingle and chat about topics and we don't have anything that lets us do that so that's definitely somewhere we need to move.

(Julie Marcy): And (Maria) this is (Julie). I've got several comments and questions coming in for you and (Hunter).

(Maria Placht): Well (Julie) we can - let's just move into the question and answer. I mean I'm pretty much finished.

(Julie Marcy): Okay. Well one was a comment that came in. And that is that (Chris Evans) at Corps headquarters and the military munitions support services community have been doing large scale virtual webinars since last January. So that's another resource (Chris Evans) at headquarters who has more good experience to tap into.

And now a few questions that have come in on chat and I'll start these then I'll reopen the mute - un-mute the lines. The first one was did participants have an opportunity to pre-register for specific sessions or did they just register for the overall event?

(Maria Placht): It was very important for us to make people register for specific sections because that informed the type of technology - the type of phone line that we were going to use for that session. The Reservationless lines are free and we have them already and those are our favorite ones to use so that was our preferred option. But when people registered for each session we discovered that some sessions had 200, 250 people registered for them and so we had to get different lines. So that was absolutely imperative to know who was coming.

(Julie Marcy):   Okay or at least have an idea since it wasn't a 100% match.

(Maria Placht):   A very close idea. A very close idea.

(Julie Marcy):   The next one was how did you and (Hunter) handle the cross country time differences?

(Maria Placht):   So if you'll notice on the agenda it was - every day was 1:00 to 5:00 PM. That time was chosen specifically because of the time differences. That was the four hours that the team thought. It's one to five eastern and those were the four hours that we thought were the best for all time zones. It was tough for Hawaii sometimes but they made it.

(Julie Marcy):   Okay. And the last one that I've had coming in - a couple more coming in on chat. How did you all handle questions and answers for such a large group? Did you have particular tricks that you used in order to get good representation and prevent an individual from dominating the conversation?

(Maria Placht):   (Hunter) do you want to take that one?

(Hunter Merritt):   Sure. Any one particular individual dominating the conversation was never - that never presented itself as an issue. Like (Maria) was saying, the greater challenge was actually to create a space for engagement and then entice people to participate. It's much like the webinar said that you're doing today. We emphasized that the chat room was available and I mentioned to people that hey, the chat room is available and you can chat with any one of these folks off, you know, individually. You don't have to chat with everyone.

So, you know, I would kind of highlight for people the tools that they have. In the first five minutes as a facilitator into doing the introduction I would kind of orient everyone to the tools they had. Now I don't know how much chatting went on in the chat room that I never saw but a lot of times there were people who posted private questions to me and it was nice as a facilitator while the presenter was going on that I could answer a question offline privately and say can I post this publicly. Would you like to ask that? I would encourage people to hit star six and ask the question themselves.

So that was sort of how I handled it and I never had to really moderate anyone from speaking too much. That was not never a problem.

(Julie Marcy): Okay, great. And this is (Julie) again. What are your thoughts on the potential applicability of using this approach for public meetings?

(Hunter Merritt): This is (Hunter) again. I would say that the challenge that you're going to find is familiarity and comfort with the tool. I mean I would think that it's a great opportunity to use it in addition but I think maybe the folks who would be participating in public meetings would already be familiar with traditional means of getting together and would perhaps be uncomfortable if you try to do virtually only a virtual meeting. But I'd be curious to know if anyone else had comments or suggestions on that. It's a very good question.

(Maria Placht): Now (Hunter) there's a - one of the cool things coming from the GLMRIS study - the Great Lakes of Mississippi River Inner Basin Study - is they've done webinars following the release of the report that they pulled together as part of the study. So they have a series of reports that they release and after each report they announce to the public that they're going to have a webinar to review the content of that report. Now I don't know how interactive they are but they - that is with the public and I'm pretty sure they used AT&T.

Anyone else on the phone happen to use it for public meetings or are aware of any instances to share?

(Julie Marcy): Okay. And I released the un-mute lines but if you had pressed your mute button you would need to press that again or do a * six. So I'll wait just a moment for that and I had another question come in.

Woman: Okay this is Portland District. And for the Columbia River Treaty review we have used web meeting extensively not only for managing the sovereign engagement process but we've also used it for public meetings and it has been a forum that we've offered in addition to face to face public meetings and it worked really well.

(Julie Marcy): That's great. This is (Julie) were these separate virtual events or were you doing a blended event where you had perhaps a group in person and then logged others in? How did you all do that part?

Woman: We've done it both ways. We've offered at different key points just webinars where people have logged in but under this last one where we had the public meetings about the draft regional recommendation we had meetings that offered both in person and the web meeting.

(Julie Marcy): Great. Thank you.

(Hunter Merritt): That's great.

Woman: I think it's important to note that we had two different facilitators. We had one person facilitating just the web meeting that communicated with the people in the room that there were people on the web meeting that wanted to ask

questions. The two facilitators partnered. One watched the website and kept monitoring the chat and that person communicated directly with the kind of in-person facilitators so that those two had eye to eye contact the entire time and passed some notes back and forth when needed.

(Julie Marcy):   Okay, great.

(Hunter Merritt):   That's a really excellent point in terms of, you know, if you're talking about a meeting in which it's sort of hybrid you definitely - it's really very difficult to have one facilitator do both. I've been in the position of trying to engage half of the audience virtually and the other half in a room and that's a great challenge. So for anyone that's putting together a team and considering this to be sort of half and half or some form of meeting that several people will participate virtually. It would be a good idea to dedicate a person to that.

(Maria Placht):   It's absolutely a best practice. I would totally undersCorps that as really a best practice.

(Julie Marcy):   Thank you. This is (Julie) again. I had another question that came in for (Hunter) and (Maria). Can you explain a little more about how you did the technology test calls? Were these just individuals calling in to practice or did different agencies or organizations call in as a group? How did you all do that?

(Hunter Merritt):   (Maria)?

(Maria Placht):   Sure. I can go. We - so we set up three different days during two different weeks at three different times to try and get the most participation as we could from the participants. So everybody who registered - we basically opened the AT&T webinar space like you see here today. We manned it for a period of

two hours with one of our facilitators and it was just open for two hours. People came in. They made sure they could get in. They made sure they could hear the audio. They played around with the tools. They got familiar with it. They practiced and then they got out.

And so each person was probably only in the space for maybe 10 or 15 minutes and we had a couple hundred people come through during the three different days and it was really worthwhile. There were some hiccups that we were able to overcome, some more lengthy people or more lengthy efforts that we had to undertake with certain people to make sure that their computer was setup correctly. And I think we really overcame a lot of hurdles that would have been really frustrating if we had experienced those during webinar week.

(Julie Marcy): Okay, great.

(Hunter Merritt): This is (Hunter) and I'd add onto that two things. One, as a facilitator it was great to be assigned a particular workshop with a particular list of presenters and to be able to call those presenters and say where can I meet you, you know, either physically. We actually have - one of my presenters was actually in Folsom. So I got to meet him physically but where can I, you know, where would it be most beneficial? Would you like to have a one on one conversation? That's where I use my Reservationless line as sort of a sandbox.

The other piece of that and I can't remember where we were in the presentation earlier but it occurred to me to say that I was actually a presenter at one of these. I was in session B3 as a presenter so it was an interesting sort of a turn and I will say that we had the chance because we were geographically located - we actually put all of our presenters in the same room physically. So that was a really creative sort of change and it developed a relationship already with a colleague in another federal agency.

So I guess I mention that because anything that you can do to overcome - I remember what it was. It was the bullet of how do you replicate that coffee chat or the offline conversations whenever possible. If you can say hey you guys come on over and physically get into this room, I'd encourage that whenever it's possible.

(Julie Marcy): This is (Julie). Another question - if someone sees that they're going to have a need for a large capacity virtual meeting, how would they go about obtaining or accessing the executive conference line service?

(Maria Placht): What district is this person from? It depends. Well in my experience it depends on your district. It depends on the process that you've set up locally and it's different for everyone.

(Julie Marcy): Okay so would they start with their local ACE IT and say that they have that need? And then they could tell them what the approval process is for their district or their area?

(Maria Placht): They may have no clue but yes, you could try that.

(Julie Marcy): Okay. And don't we have a primary point of contact for the Corps - for that as well from ACE IT - a gentleman at headquarters?

(Maria Placht): I don't know if he's the primary contact for all of the Corps. I would hesitate to give out his name for that purpose.

(Julie Marcy): Okay. So start with your ACE IT folks or your IT folks if you're outside the Corps. And if you run into a brick wall, just give a call or email to (Julie)

(Maria) or (Hunter) and we'll see if we can't get you some additional information to get you squared away.

(Maria Placht):   Like I was saying, I really feel like we're in the dark ages. I don't think that many people in the Corps have used the executive conference line and I don't feel like there's a standard protocol for how to go about doing it and getting it. It was really frustrating for us - really frustrating.

(Julie Marcy):   Alright, thank you. Any additional questions that anyone has? Again you can either use chat or you should be able to ask verbally now as well if you have unmuted yourself if you happen to have pressed your button.

(Hunter Merritt):   I have - this is (Hunter). I have a couple that were sent to me. One question is, is it easy to set up a poll on AT&T? It is. It's really easy. As a presenter you would get in as a presenter. You have to know in the upper right hand corner there's a little bit of a - there's a little drop down menu and you would select that and select manage panels and I can type this into the chat for you too but you can only do it if you're the presenter.

Manage panels - open that up and then select poll as one of the panels. It isn't an automatic panel like chat and participant. It's a panel that you have to select. Once you select it it's really easy to build it and then you save it to your hard drive and you can just pull it right up when you're giving your presentation.

(Hunter Merritt):   There was one other mention and I - we completely forgot to mention this (Maria) and that is one of the other benefits that we realized was that it was a way for participants to obtain professional registration and certification credits. I think that might have been an early on question if we were going to

do it virtually whether that would count or not. So I'll maybe just hand it over to you to speak to that if you have some feedback on it.

(Maria Placht):   Feedback. I mean (Stephanie) I see that you're on the line. Did you want to jump in and explain the process that you went through to have it qualify?

(Hunter Merritt): We don't want to put anybody on the spot with it.

(Maria Placht):   Well she went - yes. I'm not sure if she's listening (unintelligible). Is she there?

(Stephanie):   Hi.

(Maria Placht):   There she is.

(Stephanie Bray): So I wasn't un-muted. I thought I was but I wasn't. Hi. Sorry, okay. So I was talking on mute for a while.

Sure, this is (Stephanie Bray). On the headquarters I'm staff support to the floaters management program and I was one of the planning group for this webinar week and I had the task of insuring that we could offer professional credit for the certified flood plan manager program through ASF10. And we also offered credit or attempted to offer credit for professional engineers for continuing added authentication.

For the CFM program we have offered CFM credit for the past several years when we did our in-person workshops. So that was somewhat of a matter of course. They were a little bit concerned about proof of attendance for the webinar week since people obviously aren't sitting around the table together and you know everybody was there.

So what we did was we had people request credit at the beginning of the webinar and then a couple of minutes before the end of the webinar we did a scroll through the participant list and if somebody was still there we put a yes down and they got credit and if they weren't still there we put no and they unfortunately didn't get credit.

And I've only had a few people argue with me about their being marked as absent and not getting credit. For the professional engineer credit this was the first time that we'd actually offered this so it was - it's a little bit more of a complicated process because we actually had to give people certificates instead of just submitting a list of names to ASF10.

And the thing about that I found about the professional engineering credit is that, you know, every state has their own process so all we were really able to do was offer a certificate that said the person who wanted the credit participated in the webinar and it was signed by Mrs. (Karen Durmagulera) as the senior professional engineer involved with webinar week and then I sent out the certificates to everybody who requested them.

And I guess they'll go through their normal process by the time to renew their license and they'll submit the certificate and hopefully it'll count but I think that's dependent to the state process. But we followed the same process of tracking attendance to show - to confirm that people really did deserve the credit.

(Julie Marcy): Alright, thank you (Stephanie). This is (Julie). So it sounds like it really depends on the organization that you're trying to get the continuing credits or certifications with. And I know I've done some additional web meetings working with the Project Management Institute where they've authorized

PDU's under a particular classification that they have. So again you just have to work through the particular organization that's appropriate for your topic and audience..

We have just a few more minutes for questions. Let's see. I had another question come in on chat. What about addressing environmental justice issues when you reach out to specific low income or minority communities? Did environmental justice come up in your presentation in terms of making it available to everyone in the Silver Jackets community that needed access?

(Maria Placht):   That - okay so this is (Maria). If you did not come up the Silver Jackets teams in each of the states sort of took the lead on sharing the information within their state and I'm not sure to what degree they factored that in but the overall point that's important in that question is who is your audience that you're reaching out to and what is the appropriate method to reach out to them with. And webinars and this type of technology is not appropriate for every audience.

So if you're thinking of using a webinar as a public meeting which I think - I don't want to say it's fairly common but we use it here and I know people across the Corps use it. You need to make sure - you need to think through carefully who your audience is and if they have access to a computer, to internet, if they're comfortable with it. You know, if there is some capacity building that can be done and you can do so through a technology test day then I think that's appropriate but the underlying point is that this kind of outreach method is not appropriate for every context and everyone just needs to think that through.

(Julie Marcy):   Okay and this is (Julie) again. Another question - do you anticipate doing another virtual Silver Jackets conference this year and opening it up to a large number of participants again?

(Maria Placht):   So it's an annual meeting and the plan A for next year is that it will be an actual combination conference where there - and (Stephanie) can add to this. But the plan A is to have an in-person workshop with a more limited number than last year. Last year there were 250 participants so this coming year they might aim for 100 and then still have virtual connection opportunities for others who are not attending.

So they're going to do a more combined version next time if all goes well. If somehow it's not approved or it doesn't work out then I do think that people were happy enough with how this works that they would do it again.

(Maria Placht):   (Stephanie) did you have any further clarifications on that?

(Stephanie Bray): I would just say I mean that's exactly right. We hope to have at least a partial in-person workshop in this coming year but of course the conference guidance has become, you know, much more stringent over the past couple of years and I don't know what our chance of success is to get something approved. So if that doesn't happen we'll certainly go back to I think an all virtual approach.

(Julie Marcy):   This is (Julie Marcy) again. I'm going to need to wrap up our session now because we have an AT&T computer code challenge that we're dealing with that will end up cutting off our meeting shortly until they correct the situation on the first of November. Thank you very much to (Hunter) and (Maria) for sharing your knowledge and experiences with us and for all of you participating calling in. I think it's been a great session.

Remember this will be archived on the facilitator's exchange pages and if you are outside the Corps I've provided my contact information. It's julie.b.marcy@usace.army.mil. Just let me know and I will get a PDF of the presentation or additional information to you.

Those of you that are on the facilitator's exchange recently received the fall issue of our newsletter. If you didn't receive it and you want to be added to the list just let me - (Julie Marcy) - know and be watching for the winter issue and the winter webinar announcement in the months ahead. Please let me know if you have suggested topic ideas for either the newsletter or webinar and I'll be glad to incorporate those.

With that are there any last thoughts (Hunter) from you and (Maria)?

(Hunter Merritt): I really appreciate the opportunity to talk about the successes that we had and I'm looking forward to doing it again. I know we didn't say that at the end of the week because we were all exhausted but I just want to say that I'd be very happy to work with the same team again and do the same thing (Maria) so.

(Maria Placht): Thanks (Hunter). Yes and for anyone on the line, you know, that's trying to tackle this, it isn't easy. And all of us who did it this year I know would be happy to serve as a resource for you to help, you know, in any way that we can. If not it's a challenge but it served its purpose and I think it was a success. And (Julie) also just thanks for inviting me and letting me share the experience with everyone.

(Julie Marcy): Thank you. I appreciate it.

(Hunter Merritt): Thanks (Julie).

(Julie Marcy):   Great presentation and if anyone had additional questions we didn't get to, just send an email to (Julie Marcy) (Maria Placht) or (Hunter Merritt) and we will get you fixed up. And with that I'll conclude our session. Thank you everyone for attending. And thanks again (Hunter) and (Maria).

END